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## THACKERAY.

MR. LEWIS MELVILLE has given the literary world what may be called a *variorum* edition of the "Life of Thackeray."\* His purpose seems to have been to get up two volumes of a size that would decently represent Thackeray's place in our literature. He has succeeded in padding the two volumes to an adequate size, but the new matter might have been compressed into a volume one-third the size of either of these. To the lover of Thackeray, however, this is of small import; for Mr. Melville has read diligently in magazine literature and contemporary biography, and culled therefrom much that is of interest and information concerning Thackeray. He has also collected from the novels a number of quotations that throw light on the novelist's methods, thoughts, and personal experiences, all of which only convinces us more thoroughly of what is said in another part of the present article—namely, that the best biography of Thackeray is his autobiography as found in his various works.

The present biography is a fairly good reference book, although a large part of its usefulness as such is impaired by the omission of an index. But after all of an adverse nature is said, the numerous sketches and drawings, the facsimile representations of several of the letters of Thackeray, and of the original cover designs of the "Book of Snobs," "Vanity Fair," "Pendennis," "The Newcomes," and "The Virginians (the three last named being given in the original yellow of the monthly parts), the suppressed picture of the Marquis of Steyne, and other interesting Thackerayesque illustrations, together with a text admirable in its mechanical perfection and arrangement, with as complete a bibliography as possible of all the volumes, contributions to

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\* The Life of William Makepeace Thackeray, by Lewis Melville. In two volumes, \$10. Herbert S. Stone & Co., Chicago.

periodicals, drawings, miscellanea, and volumes containing biographical material—all go to make the book a very valuable one. More than this, it is bound to be the standard reference life of Thackeray, at least until either Mrs. Ritchie sees fit to consolidate and enlarge her “*Chapters from Some Unwritten Memoirs*,” and the “*Biographical Introductions*,” or Mr. Leslie Stephen should undertake to extend his article on Thackeray in the “*Dictionary of National Biography*,” and fuse the whole into such a work of art as he knows how to produce in his special field of endeavor.

There are a number of anecdotes in this “*Life*,” though no new one, as far as I can see, is added. The inevitable letter that the little William wrote from England to his “*mamma*” in Calcutta, in the year 1818, when he was barely seven years old, his birth having occurred in that far-off city July 18, 1811; the story of the large head, and the alarmed Aunt Ritchie consulting a physician only to be told that the head was large but there was much in it; the unhappy school days at Chiswick and Charterhouse (though Mr. Melville thinks the unhappiness during the Charterhouse days has been unduly exaggerated); the talent for drawing, especially burlesque representations and caricatures; the fight with George Venables, resulting in a broken nose for Thackeray; the faculty for making verses, chiefly parodies, with a parallel copy of his first effort in print, a parody and its original, the subject being “*Violets, dark blue Violets*,” rendered by the youthful parodist, “*Cabbages, bright green Cabbages*,” the practical joke played on Dr. Senior who, as a boy, sat next to Thackeray at Charterhouse, and was prompted by him to give some absurd answer when Dr. Russell put a question which was not heard; the story, as related in a roundabout paper on “*Tunbridge Joys*,” of the hungry boy with no money of his own, but with five-and-twenty shillings of his parents’ money in his pocket; the subsequent visits to Charterhouse with the speech made to the boys, and the decision to call up one of the coddles to sit for Colonel Newcome, who was himself to

be a codd;—all this is told and not unpleasantly, in the initial chapters on “Childhood and Charterhouse.”

Thackeray went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1829, and left two years later “unplucked but degreeless.” A long list of his Cambridge friends, most of whom afterwards became famous, a description of his careless habits of work, his admiration for the poetry of Shelley, his spouting at the “Union,” his contributions to *The Snob, a Literary and Scientific Journal not Conducted by Members of the University*, especially his verses on “Timbuctoo”—the subject on which Alfred Tennyson won the medal for the best poem—give the biographer material for the chapter on Cambridge. The travels in Germany, the life at court in Weimar—where he met Goethe and thought of translating Schiller into English—the picture-drawing for the children, the reading of novels, and attendance on the Weimar theater make up another year of the young man’s life. The study of the law began in 1831, and the episode of Charles Buller’s political campaign, in which the embryo lawyer took part, occurred in the following summer. Thackeray did not take to the law, and in July of 1832, just when he became of age and entered into full possession of his property, he deserted the Middle Temple, and determined to make his way in some other line of work. A little later he invested some money in the *National Standard* and became the editor of that journal; but it failed, and with it went down a large part of the young man’s fortune. There were other losses too, so it became necessary for Thackeray to earn his own living. He wrote to his mother, however, that it was a great deal better for him to be a poor man, for he would be so much happier to have to work for a living. Truly the only real happiness is to be found in work, and necessity is the surest incentive to continued effort.

There was just enough of Thackeray’s fortune left to fit him for making his own living. Art was his natural bent, and he went to Paris to study and prepare himself for the work. He did not succeed in making an artist of himself,

but he learned how to illustrate and made good use of this accomplishment in his later works. He tried journalism again as Paris correspondent of *The Constitutional*, his step-father having invested in that ultra liberal paper with the understanding that Thackeray was to be a regular correspondent. There was a stipulated salary of four hundred pounds, and Thackeray, having met and fallen in love with Miss Isabella Creagh Shawe, married on this prospect. But *The Constitutional* failed in less than a year, and the young married man was thrown upon his own resources for an immediate support. Happily he had had sufficient training in journalism to be able to earn something at it, so he crossed the channel and began the struggle against poverty and want, wielding his two sharp weapons of warfare—pen and pencil. Mr. Melville has classified as far as possible all the contributions, both authentic and doubtful, made to the different periodicals during this period. *Frazer's Magazine*, *The Times*, *The Corsair* (published in New York under the editorship of N. P. Willis), *Cruikshank's Comic Annual*, and *The New Monthly Magazine* make up the list of the most important magazines to which he contributed.

It was at the home of Maj. Carmichael-Smyth that Thackeray's first daughter, Annie, the only surviving member of the family and the now famous author of novels and memoirs, was born. After the birth of the first child the young couple moved into Great Coram Street, and here were born two other daughters, one of them dying in infancy and the other living to become the wife of the famous biographer, Leslie Stephen. Soon after the birth of the third child Thackeray went on a trip to Belgium to make up a book of travels. His wife was seemingly in a fair way for a speedy recovery, but the husband was quickly called back to find her in a peculiar state of mental collapse. A kind of languor or torpor had seized upon her, and her condition became more and more hopeless. I dare not attempt to speak of the courage, the fortitude, the Christlike manhood that a resignation to this great sorrow demanded of this man who loved his wife

and home as he did. All that could be done was done. Thackeray watched over her and cared for her with a woman's tenderness. He carried her to Ireland and France and Germany, and for two years nursed the hope that she would recover. There was nothing of wildness or raving in her malady, but she was altogether incapable of activity. She was finally placed under the care of a trusted attendant, and, strange to say, she survived her husband almost thirty years, living in this helpless state until 1892. (Melville gives 1894 as the date, but Mr. Leslie Stephen is perhaps better informed.)

The children were sent to Paris to live with their grandmother, and Thackeray took up his lonely quarters in London to continue his work, striving to make money to meet the heavy demands upon him and to lay up something for his daughters. He was a constant contributor to the magazines. "The Yellowplush Papers," "History of Samuel Titmarsh," and "The Great Hoggarty Diamond" appeared in *Frazer's Magazine*. As Mrs. Ritchie suggests, Thackeray, like Haroun-al-Rashid, loved to masquerade under assumed titles. Some of his fancies in this line were, "George Fitz-Boodle," "Launcelot Wagstaff," "Michael Angelo Titmarsh," "Charles Yellowplush," "Punch's Commissioner," "Policeman X," "Our Fat Contributor," "Miss Tickletoby," "Ikey Solomon," "Major Gahagan," *et al.* Mr. Melville argues that this was the main reason why Thackeray was so long in establishing himself with the public. He was compelled to keep the pot boiling, and editors would have objected to the use of one name to all the articles that he was turning out at this period. Mr. Melville takes the position that Thackeray's genius was not so late in developing, but that the public had not had a chance to discover him until he began to use his own name. The truth of the matter, we think, is this: Thackeray had been gradually growing in favor with the critics and professional bookmen, and when he was thirty-six years of age he gave the public a chance to discover him by publishing a book that suited the people—namely, "Vanity Fair." He had been moving

among the literary fraternity, was becoming well known at several clubs—one of which he himself founded—and at the offices of some of the best periodicals, and he had made friends enough to help him push this more pretentious work.

Thackeray was illustrating many of own articles at this time, and it was perhaps through this faculty, as well as through his predilection for humorous writing, that he was attracted in 1842 to *Punch*. *Punch* was on its baby legs in those days, and among the more serious literary men there was some feeling of contempt for this light laughter; but Thackeray was willing to trust his reputation there and he stuck to it for a long time, even to the days of its power. And who can tell how much he contributed to its rapid growth into favor? “It was a good thing for himself, the journal, and the world, when Thackeray found *Punch*,” said one of the later editors.

To *Punch* Thackeray contributed many ballads and miscellanies, but the most important series he sent there was the “Snob Papers.” Thackeray hated snobs and snobbishness, and he saw that the world was full of that peculiar species of animal. I shall reserve a paragraph on this great aim of his life—namely, the suppression of snobs—in a final estimate of the great man and his work. A letter written to some Edinburgh friends, thanking them for the gift of a silver figure of the supernatural hunchback, Mr. Punch, shows the spirit in which Thackeray attacked snobs, and in fact it gives us an insight into what he considered his duty toward mankind in the use of the gifts with which God had endowed him:

“If you are *grati*, I am *gratior*. Such tokens of regard and sympathy are very precious to a writer like myself, who have some difficulty still in making people understand what you have been good enough to find in Edinburgh—that under the mask satirical there walks about a sentimental gentleman, who means not unkindly to any mortal person. . . . I assure you, these tokens of what I can’t help acknowledging as popularity make me humble as well as grateful, and

make me feel an almost awful sense of the responsibility which falls upon a man in such a station. Is it deserved or undeserved? Who is this that sets up to preach to mankind, and to laugh at many things which men reverence! I hope I may be able to tell the truth always, and see it aright, according to the eyes which God Almighty gives me."

Before the "Snob Papers" began to appear in *Punch* a novel had been published in *Frazer's Magazine*. It was "Barry Lyndon." Critics have united upon this as a work of supremest quality; and while it has never become popular, it takes high rank as an artistic literary production. It is the autobiography of an Irish gambler, giving, in minute detail, the life, character, thoughts, and feelings of a scoundrel.

It was soon after this that the great novel, "Vanity Fair," began to appear in monthly installments. Mr. Melville argues against the popular notion that "Vanity Fair" went begging at several publishing houses. Thackeray says himself that it was rejected by Colburn for the *New Monthly Magazine*. Mr. Melville shows that only a few initial chapters, entitled "Pencil Sketches on English Society," had been written, and that the great title had not yet come to the author. He further substantiates his position by quoting from Mr. Vizetelly, who saw much of Thackeray at this time and who says: "I know perfectly well that after the publication commenced much of the remainder of the work was written under pressure for and from the printer, and not infrequently the first installment of 'copy' needed to fill the customary thirty-two pages was penned while the printer's boy was waiting in the hall at Young Street."

Thackeray was in great trepidation during the first numbers lest the whole thing should prove a failure. The book finally caught the public ear, however, and his reputation was made permanent. There have been three theories or reasons advanced as to the cause of the sudden change from failure to success of "Vanity Fair" as it was appearing in monthly parts—namely, Currer Bell's enthusiastic dedication of the second edition of her great book, "Jane Eyre,"



to W. M. Thackeray, Esq.; the appreciative review of Thackeray's works in the *Edinburgh Review* by Hayward, in which he said, judging by what had been already published, "'Vanity Fair' is as sure of immortality as ninety-nine hundredths of modern novels are sure of annihilation;" and the publication of Thackeray's Christmas book, "Mrs. Perky's Ball." This last was Thackeray's own opinion of the cause of the sudden leap of "Vanity Fair" into popularity. Mr. Melville thinks the most probable and simple explanation is that these things gave an impetus to the sale, but that the main cause of wider success was that the book recommended itself by the greater interest that was to be found in its pages as it progressed. In support of this view Mr. Melville quotes Fitzgerald, who wrote in one of his letters: "'Vanity Fair' began dull, I thought, but gets better every number."

Thackeray had a home and family in Young Street at this time—that is, as Mrs. Ritchie says, "if a house, two young children, three servants, and a little black cat can be called a family." He had brought his two girls over from Paris, and had, in some sense, reestablished a home for himself.

It was perhaps Dickens' success with his books in monthly installments that prompted Thackeray to send out his novel in yellow covers, at one shilling the number. Dickens had been far more successful than Thackeray, but a natural rivalry sprang up between them. Of course the former had all the advantage of a wide circulation and a natural tact of putting himself and his wares forward. There were, however, two hostile camps among the younger critics. Thackeray never had any but the kindest feelings toward Dickens as an artist, and expressed himself both in public and private as an ardent admirer of his great contemporary's works. At a later period an estrangement existed between the two, and it was only within a few days of his death that Thackeray met Dickens at a club and spontaneously shook hands with him.

We enter now upon the period of the full bloom of Thackeray's fame. There was never what we would call a

Thackeray craze. He grew very gradually into public favor. He had been gaining stanch friends from the first, but "Vanity Fair" gave his name to the general public. Then he held his place by adding, from time to time, those masterful novels, "The Newcomes," "Pendennis," "Henry Esmond," "The Adventures of Philip," and "Denis Duval."

Thackeray was not making money fast enough, even after the success of "Vanity Fair," and he was on the alert for some means of securing a competency for his daughters. Lecturing naturally suggested itself to him, but it was not yet the custom for authors to go upon the platform with their wares. It was rather looked upon as a cheap method of gaining notoriety. To a man of Thackeray's gifts the field was inviting, and he could see no reason why he should not make money in this way. His native talent fitted him for writing entertaining lectures, but his natural reserve and even timidity militated seriously against a successful public appearance. It was at Willis' Rooms in London, May 21, in the year 1851, that the first of the lectures on the "English Humorists" was given. It was a momentous event with the gentle, timid, unassuming author. He was nervous and full of trepidation lest his effort should fail. Charlotte Brontë, who was one of his most ardent admirers, as the dedication of the second edition of "Jane Eyre" indicates, has left this bit of evidence: "There is quite a furore for his lectures. They are a sort of essays, characterized by his own peculiar originality and power, and delivered with a finished taste and ease which is felt, but cannot be described."

"Vanity Fair" and "Pendennis" were already published, and "Henry Esmond" was just coming from the press when the lecturer started to America to get some hard American dollars, and it is needless to say that he got them in good measure. He seemed wonderfully affected to be able to make so much money for his little ones, and he breaks out into a joyful little burlesque,

And grim Death, if ever he come to me,  
Will find that I have the £ s. d.

One thing that Americans like about this visit of Thackeray's is the sense of gratitude shown to a people who had received him so cordially and magnanimously. He writes: "As for writing about this country, about Gotham, about Canada, flowing with milk and honey, about the friends I have found here, and who are helping me to procure independence for my children, if I cut jokes against them, may I choke on the instant. If I can say anything to show that my name is really Makepeace, and to increase the source of love between the two countries, then, please God, I will." He visited America again in 1855 and delivered the old set, "The Humorists," first, and then the new set, prepared especially for the American public, "The Four Georges." In the meantime he had been traveling over Europe with his daughters, and that great book, "The Newcomes," had been written.

In 1857 Thackeray tried a hook in another pond. He was ambitious for a seat in the House of Commons and a political career. He wanted to represent the city of Oxford and went about making speeches for himself. He had no tricks of oratory, nor was he eloquent in the popular conception of eloquence, yet he did not make a poor speaker. The race was a close one: Cardwell, 1,085; Thackeray, 1,018—a difference of 67 votes. Thackeray had made a kind of campaign motto of the phrase, "May the best man win!" and while his opponent may not have been the best man, he was probably the best man to have won, for Thackeray himself said after the election, "I will retire and take my place with my pen and ink at my desk, and leave to Mr. Cardwell a business which I am sure he understands better than I do." And so he retired to his desk and began a new story, "The Virginians," a novel which deals with the second generation of the Esmonds.

A word must be said of the much-talked-of quarrel with Edmund Yates. This young man published in his paper, *Town Talk*, a scurrilous attack on Thackeray, accusing him, among other things, of insincerity in his personal relations.

Instead of ignoring the attack as he should have done, the literary lion began to roar and move for vengeance. He wrote a scorching letter to Mr. Yates, and then demanded his expulsion from the Garrick Club. Dickens was appealed to by the young man, and the novelist justly contended that the Club should not interfere in this matter, as it was altogether a personal affair. This caused a breach between the two great writers which lasted until within a few days of Thackeray's death. The reconciliation has already been mentioned. Young Yates was expelled from the Club, and it is the general opinion now that Thackeray carried his revenge too far.

There is yet one more great literary undertaking to record. Messrs. Smith and Elder planned with Thackeray during the year 1859 to publish a magazine. They were to furnish all the capital and Thackeray was to be the editor. The first number was published in January, 1860, and the edition went over 120,000 copies—an enormous number for that day. Almost all the famous names in nineteenth century English literature appeared among the contributors to *Cornhill Magazine*. Thackeray did not have a novel ready for the first number, but he contributed one of those clever "Roundabout Papers" from his own pen, while the chief place was given to a novel by Anthony Trollope. Thackeray made a fairly good editor. Trollope says Thackeray was unmethodical in his editorial work; but one thing we know, Thackeray used his judgment as to literary merit with rare ability, and made of *Cornhill Magazine* one of the best of its kind. "Lovel the Widower," "The Adventures of Philip," and the opening chapters of "Denis Duval," the novel left unfinished at his death, all appeared in *Cornhill*.

Thackeray was not an old man yet, but he was in declining health, and seemed anxious to get everything in shape for his daughters. He built a large house at Kensington, and there took up his residence in 1862. His death occurred in December of the following year. He had been subject to some kind of spasms for several years. On the night before

Christmas he retired feeling unwell, and on the morrow was found dead. He was buried in Kensal Green. Though he did not desire it, he richly deserved a place in Westminster Abbey. He is represented in that great temple of fame by a bust by Marochetti.

The last half of Mr. Melville's second volume contains essays on "Thackeray and His Friends," among whom were Edward Fitzgerald, Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Carlyle, Mr. and Mrs. Brookfield, Charlotte Brontë, Monckton Milnes, Anthony Trollope, and a host of others; "Thackeray the Man," an appreciative estimate; "Thackeray and the Theater," a heavily padded chapter on the theme, "Thackeray was fond of the theater, but was not a successful playwright;" "Thackeray as a Public Speaker," to which is added reports of several of his speeches; "Thackeray as an Artist;" "Thackeray as Art Critic;" "Thackeray the Philosopher;" and "Thackeray the Writer." Here is reached the final estimate: "I believe his name will stand to future ages as that of the most representative English man of letters of our age, and as that of the greatest master of fiction since Henry Fielding."

To give an estimate of Thackeray's work and character, one must consider the general characteristics of his time, as well as the circumstances of his life and training. First of all, we note the sordidness of his time—the snobbishness, if you choose, of a period characterized more by a spirit of money-getting and practical prosperity than by deeper spiritual yearnings. It was a period of cold science, the ultimate tendency of which was to breed discontent and unbelief, not only respecting the established tenets of a past wedded to a literal interpretation of the revealed word of God, but even regarding the very existence and reality of the God of our being. It was a period, too, of political reformation and revolution, the outcome of which was to shatter many social distinctions of long standing, and to place all men upon a more equal footing—a settlement, indeed, upon the common people of the responsibility of self-government,

and thereby offering unprecedented opportunity for the production of *snobs*.

All these things appealed to a man of keen insight and naturally satirical mind like Thackeray, as deserving of an uncovering and exposing to the view of the world. He saw the hollowness and pretense of the outside show, and, like a true knight, took up his lance and boldly advanced to the attack. "Such people there are," he writes in "Vanity Fair," "living and flourishing in the world—faithless, hopeless, charitiless; let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and very successful, too, mere quacks and fools; and it was to combat such as these, no doubt, that laughter was made." Here we have the clue to his satirical view of life. There is a deeper current of serious purpose ever flowing under the surface bubbles of his humor and satire. We can imagine that Thackeray never wrote a line without weighing the effect of his words upon the impression of the whole. He could not paint a scene, he could not imagine a conversation, he could not depict a character without first laying out a definite plan for final effect and without first satisfying himself as to the *raison d'être*. Lord Houghton (Monckton Milnes) wrote in *Cornhill Magazine* at the time of Thackeray's death:

O gentle censor of our age,  
Prime master of our ampler tongue,  
Whose word of wit and generous page  
Were never wroth except with wrong.

All agree that Thackeray was the censor of his age, and many there are who will agree to place the adjective "gentle" before the title. But he has been called more than a gentle censor; he has been called a cynic. Most assuredly he was no cynic in his life. Man has rarely seen a life more full of gentleness, compassion, tenderness, charity. It was his daily existence to bring happiness to those around him, to give aid to some poor struggling brother. Dr. A. Conan Doyle, in treating of the blessedness of a smile, by way of

illustration, has this to say: "I remember in my earliest childhood a man of giant frame who used to visit our house. He was broad of shoulder and deep of chest; his head was massive, his hands were big, and he could just squeeze through the door of our home. I remember he used to trot me on his knee, and his face always fascinated my gaze, because it was always a smiling face, a face that attracted every one as a light attracts our gaze on a dark night. This man was William Makepeace Thackeray."

As we look back upon the man in imagination, we see an enormous amount of genuine soul hovering about him. We feel when we read his pages that the irrepressible voice of genius speaks with an authority which brooks no opposition. Suffused over his large frame, and especially over his round, flattened, spectacled face is a genial good humor which bids us come near and be among his friends. He takes us by the hand, and tells us to stand by his side and watch him lash the snobs, who are not ourselves, of course. We feel that by the supreme loftiness of his intellect he becomes a literary parent to the world—one of Carlyle's heroes, in a literary sense, of course—who is made to teach and lead the world, and whom we must set apart for worship and obedience, and whose parental right it is to chastise earth's wayward children.

With the exception of "Henry Esmond" all of Thackeray's novels may be placed under the general title of "Vanity Fair." In fact, "Vanity Fair" is unquestionably the greatest of his books. The others, with the single exception named above, are but the fuller development of the principles, methods, and thoughts laid down in the first great work. "Henry Esmond" is a great book in its way, but it is a *tour de force*, and while it is an almost marvelous performance in the reproduction of the literary style and spirit of Queen Anne's reign, and in its unique historical setting, it does not, to my mind, represent the best of Thackeray's style and spirit. The realm of his greatest strength was Vanity Fair. He stood upon an eminence, and watched the pro-

cession pass. There appeared to his view good, bad, and indifferent representatives of both sexes, and *vanity* was written in more or less deeply graven lines upon every brow.

He not only gives us a minute history of the doings and sayings of this crowd as it passes; but in addition he puts forward his own estimate of their characters, and tells us just what he thinks of each member of the company. The most palpable fact before us, when he stands off to take a general view of the comedy and tragedy of life as it appears on the boards of this Vanity Fair, is the all-pervasive presence of the manager. We have good, live people on the stage; we hear them speak and see them move, and they speak in their own voices and move with their own powers of locomotion—never in the ventriloquized voice of the manager, nor with his powers—but still we feel the effect of his presence, the influence of his sympathies, and the impress of his thoughts. Thackeray permeates his works. If we read the novels, we know the man as from his own autobiography. We know what he feels, we know what he thinks, we know the things that he loves, we know the things that he hates, we know his mental characteristics, we know his sympathies, we know his antipathies, we know his heart. It is useless to begin a catalogue of what he thinks and feels, for his intellect and heart are so full and their expression so complete that the task becomes at once almost impossible in its stupendousness. We can only reach an approximate estimate of detached characteristics of the great whole.

Perhaps in all the history of literature no novelist has come down from his platform and talked face to face with the reader so persistently and so personally as Thackeray does. In an artist less skillful we should condemn this familiarity and proclaim the author a self-conceited, self-vaunting bore; but somehow, when we read Thackeray's works we are drawn, as by a powerful magnet, to the very personality of the man, and are charmed listeners to his every word of personal confidence. This personal element in literature, and especially in novels, has been loudly con-



demned by some critics, but not all readers are willing to lose the personalities—the Burnses, Goldsmiths, Fieldings, Hawthornes, Johnsons, and Tennysons—from our literature. What a wonderful range these personal asides from the manager of the plays cover! Here is a bit of moralizing; there a solid chunk of philosophy; now a touch of pathos and sentiment, or even of sentimentality; and, again, a sting of waspish satire, with the poison quickly deadened by the application of the soothing balm of love from his own tender heart. It is sometimes a question as to which is to be admired most, the artist whose deft hand so vividly portrays the comedy and tragedy of life on his broad canvas; the moralist who proclaims with a simple faith the Christian ideal; the philosopher who gives so much of the practical wisdom of everyday living and striving; the satirist who so persistently and kindly tells the world of its foibles, laughing them to scorn with his inimitable humor; or the good, kind-hearted man behind it all.

Above all, we feel that we can safely put ourselves under the guidance of so powerful an intellect. We know, as by intuition, that we are in the presence of a gigantic mind. The great, tall figure and broad face of the man looms before us while his giant brain is turning out, for our entertainment, products among the best in the world's prose literature. There is a firmness of conviction, a precision of judgment, a dignity of expression, a restraint of enthusiasm, a mildness, a mellowness, a simplicity of style, that adds a hundredfold to the power and impress of every word he says. Critics have generally placed George Eliot in the first place among intellectual novelists; but I doubt not, if the comparison were made, and pure intellectuality, not astuteness of psychological analysis—if broad, clear thinking, and not abstruse and hair-splitting distinctions of character, motives, and internal questionings—were the test, Thackeray would stand the peer, if not the superior, of George Eliot, even in her vantage plane of intellectuality.

It is no wonder, then, that with the strong leverage of his

intellect, and with his own tender, sympathizing heart as a fulcrum, Thackeray has wrought so powerfully on the human heart. There is no doubt in my mind that he understood and portrayed the human heart as no other writer in our literature, who used prose as the vehicle of his thought, has done. Let one but recall a list of characters from any of his novels, and consider for a moment not the personality nor intellectuality but the feelings and sentiments, the hearts. Is there one in any group that is altogether heartless? Is there one whose character and feelings you do not know as you know the characters and hearts of your most intimate friends? Is it not indeed a marvelous gift to be able thus to lay bare the hearts and consciences of men and women? Thackeray may even be compared with Shakespeare in this respect, allowing always for the superior genius of Shakespeare, and for the advantage of poetry over prose in the expression of the feelings. He enters into the very spirit and being of his characters; he sees the world through their eyes, thinks with their brains, feels with their hearts. He has that power of feeling as another feels, without throwing his own personality into the balance. This very excellence of his genius has led superficial readers to look upon Thackeray as a cynic, and some have even been led to consider him a scoundrel in heart, if not in deed, upon the puerile hypothesis that a man must be a scoundrel himself to know so much about a scoundrel's thoughts and feelings. One might as well call Shakespeare a villain of deepest dye because he evolved an Iago from his inner consciousness.

If there is an explanation of this power in Thackeray's case, it is evidently to be found in one word—sympathy. This was the key with which he unlocked other hearts. All through his biography we find instances of his intense sympathy for others, both in their sorrows and their joys. He was a lover of mankind, but he felt that he was bound to tell the truth. The best-known selection in this connection, and the best self-vindication and vindication of purpose to

be found in all his works, is at the end of Chapter VIII. of "Vanity Fair: "

But my kind reader will please to remember that this history has "Vanity Fair" for a title, and that Vanity Fair is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falsenesses and pretenses. And, while the moralist who is holding forth on the cover (an accurate portrait of your humble servant) professes to wear neither gown nor bands, but only the very same long-eared livery in which his congregation is arrayed, yet, look you, one is bound to speak the truth as far as one knows it, whether one mounts a cap and bells or a shovel hat; and a deal of disagreeable matter must come out in the course of such an undertaking. . . . And, as we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform and talk about them: if they are good and kindly, to love them and shake them by the hand; if they are silly, to laugh at them confidentially in the reader's sleeve; if they are wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which politeness admits of. Otherwise you might fancy that it was I who was sneering at the practice of devotion, which Miss Sharp finds so ridiculous; that it was I who laughed good-humoredly at the reeling old Silenus of a baronet; whereas the laughter comes from one who has no reverence except for prosperity, and no eye for anything beyond success.

With such an explanation before one, given, as it is, with all the charm of a frank personal confidence, the wonder is that any reader could call Thackeray a cynic.

But if Thackeray was no cynic, he was a satirist. He was not a bitter hater of mankind, as the first term would imply, but a natural censor of what he saw to be the faults and frailties of his brothers. Who can doubt that Thackeray loved mankind? Who can doubt that he pitied humanity, of which he himself was a part, and yearned to help his fallen brother just as he would have desired another to help him? You may not agree with his method of helping, of correcting, of uplifting his fellows; but you surely cannot impute to him the charge that he bore malice and bitterness in that big, loving heart of his toward his brothers in the flesh. That he made mistakes no one will deny. We can even see that he blamed others for faults with which he was himself chargeable; but he looked upon himself as a teacher—yea, even as a preacher, for he called himself always a "week-

day preacher," whose duty it was to uncover the foibles of his day, to chase into their retreats flimsy sham and pretense and vaunting vulgarity and meanness in all its forms.

You will recall the passage quoted above, showing Thackeray's love for truth. He did not care to tell a story which, even if possible, was in the least improbable. We do not read his books for the romance that is in them; we read them for the truth, the life that is there. Did you ever doubt that any character in any book of Thackeray's would have done or talked differently in real life? When you have once formed the correct idea of the character as the artist wished you to see it, have you ever doubted that such a character exists in duplicate a hundred times over, even within the scope of your own acquaintance? And, again, I would ask, have you ever noticed any character repeated? Can you find one hero type and trace the features under twenty different names, as you can of Byron's puppets? If not, then we are to pronounce Thackeray great in that he has told the truth, great in the reality of his creations, great in the portrayal of human nature. There is always something startling, bizarre, abnormal in Dickens' characters. It is a trick to impress the personality upon us. In Thackeray we find no set phrase like "Little Joe, al'aw's a movin' on;" no Smike, with his clammy hand; no one-eyed Squeers, no horrible Barnaby Rudge, no "Barkis is wil-lin'." When we stop to think of all this seriously, it is not true to life; it is abnormal; it is purely literary trickery, and we are almost ashamed of being so deceived in these untruthful portrayals. It is altogether different with Thackeray's characters. Somehow we become almost unconsciously intimate with them. They are impressed upon us gradually, and we feel that they are real human beings, talking and acting before us on the printed page as we hear and see men and women talking and acting before us in everyday life.

Thackeray lived with these people of his fancy; they were his constant companions; he talked with them in the privacy of his inner consciousness; he studied their lives

and characters, not as if he were their creator, but merely as their biographer. He asserted that when once he had brought his men and women to life, they led him, and he but followed, transferring their history to the paper as they revealed it to him. On one occasion, when he was writing "The Newcomes," some friend asked him if he had had a good night's rest. He answered: "How could I, with Col. Newcome making a fool of himself, as he has done?" "But why did you let him?" "O, it was in him. He must." Another instance of his intense sympathy for his characters was when he was bringing this story to an end, and his daughter Annie was writing at his dictation. At the very last he took the pen in his own hand, and sent the girl away. Then he told, with a long dash, all the agony that was in his own soul when that good friend of his and ours answered "*Adsum*" to the last great roll call. Again, we remember that he confessed to blubbering over the death of Helen Pendennis. If his characters moved him in this way, no wonder they affect us so powerfully!

Thackeray's idea of humor was that it should always be charitable. He defined humor as "wit and love," and added: "I am sure, at any rate, that the best humor is that which contains most humanity, that which is flavored throughout with tenderness and kindness." He did not think it was necessary for a writer to be always declaring this love, any more than a father should be always caressing his wife and children to show his affection. This certainly shows Thackeray's own idea of his fun-making. He laughed at the world because he saw the humorous side of life, not because he hated mankind on account of its weakness and its erring. He is no Dean Swift, with bitter cynicism; he is no Pope, with a biting satire which lacks the softening influence of charity; he is no Congreve, with lack of feeling and charity toward the ordinary mortals which figure in his humorous productions; but he is a warm-hearted Englishman, who loved his fellows and laughed in their faces with all good humor and kindness. L. W. PAYNE, JR.